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ABSTRACT

Suggestions for making teachers aware of nontraditional jobs and imparting that knowledge to their students are the substance of this document. The following topics are addressed: awareness of nontraditional occupations and the men and women who are involved in them, encouraging students to consider a nontraditional occupations (beginning at an early age, providing on-the-job opportunities for secondary students); recruitment strategies (seek students of all ages, advantages of nontraditional careers for employers and employees, promoting nontraditional careers); and supporting nontraditional students (tutoring, networking, providing role models). Five resources are suggested. (KC)

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NONTRADITIONAL CAREERS — MAKING THEM A TRADITION

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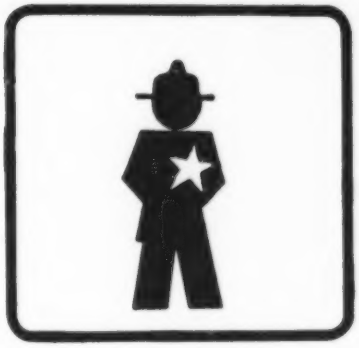
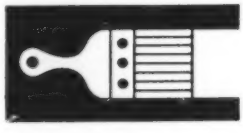


PICTURE THIS:

- A MOTHER OF THREE BUILDING AN ADDITION ON YOUR HOUSE
- A FORTY-FIVE YEAR OLD HOMEMAKER REPAIRING THE ENGINE OF YOUR CAR
- A FATHER TEACHING TODDLERS AT THE LOCAL DAY CARE CENTER
- A YOUNG WOMAN TRAINING TECHNICIANS IN THE REPAIR OF SMALL MACHINES

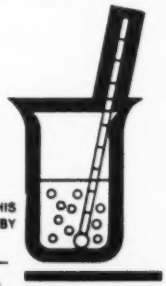
Did you have difficulty imagining the men and women in these jobs? Did the images seem to conflict with the traditional view of what people do for a living?

The people described above are "pioneers" in a **nontraditional job**. They have chosen occupations that require working in a field that has been traditionally dominated by 70% or more of the other sex. The jobs usually require postsecondary or vocational/technical training. They break the old stereotypes of "men's work" and "women's work."



It would not be surprising if the titles "police officer", "aircraft mechanic", or "insurance marketer" caused you to immediately picture a **man** on the job. Terms such as "nurse", "child care worker", or "dental hygienist" might prompt an image of a working **woman**. Because we do not often see nontraditional workers, we assume that such people do not exist, or, if they do, they are exceptions. But men and women are beginning to select their occupations based on their skills and interests, and **not** based on traditional expectations. **They are discovering that nontraditional occupations can be fulfilling, challenging, and lucrative.** Most important, they are using personal abilities that are not limited by sex role stereotyping.

Because "pioneers" are still fairly unusual, most students do not even consider nontraditional program options when it comes time to select a field of training. First, they have to be aware that the options are open to them. Second, they need recognition of their skills, and encouragement in their investigation of an occupation. Third, they need support in their nontraditional choice, both in the classroom and on the job. Then they need assistance in becoming employed.



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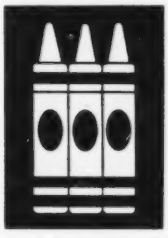
HOW DO YOU ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO CONSIDER A NONTRADITIONAL OCCUPATION?

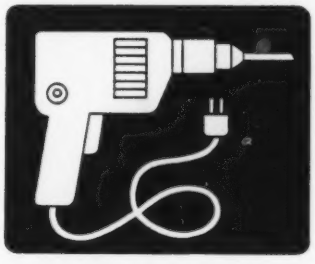
Suppose that you are a young woman who is about to meet with her guidance counselor about scheduling for the upcoming school year. The selections that you make will determine not only your academic goals, but possibly a career choice as well. You are fifteen years old, everyone is giving you advice, and the time has come to make some serious decisions.

Suppose that, as that same young woman, you have observed your father's profession, computer repair, and have been intrigued by the work that he does. He has discussed his problem cases with enthusiasm, and has included you in work he has brought home. He has shared his feelings of frustration, accomplishment, and satisfaction as he pursues his career. You welcome the challenge of becoming a computer repair technician, recognizing your own fine motor and problem-solving skills. You admire the people working in the profession and decide that you, too, want to work in computer repair.

Suddenly, you are "nontraditional," a "pioneer" in a vocational program. You have selected a field of work that has been traditionally dominated by men. Yet you are at least aware of the profession, and may even experience support at home when you announce your choice of career. You will not have to be recruited by your guidance counselor into the appropriate training program.

Most students need to be actively recruited into programs that are not traditional for their sex. Teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators not only have to inform students about a full range of occupational choices, but must work hard at encouraging students to investigate a field that seems unusual for their gender.





Begin at an early age

The job of recruitment would be easier if students were adequately informed about occupational choices. In early elementary school they should have opportunities to experiment in a variety of skill areas, and should try out the equipment, tools, and uniforms of different professions. Speakers (female police officer, male telephone operator) can share information about their work and present themselves as positive role models in nontraditional careers. Visits to BOCES and other vocational training programs not only help young people become aware of how to prepare for a job, but help them to begin to match interests and abilities with future careers. In the meantime, it is important that instructors provide an equitable school environment so that **all** students, regardless of gender, consider **all** careers.

Provide on-the-job opportunities for secondary students

When pressed to make decisions about academic and career plans, adolescents often fall back on stereotypes. If they can experience internships, shadowing of workers, visits to local employers, and after-school cooperative work experiences, they get to meet people in various professions and find out what a job is really all about. These "hands-on" opportunities, coupled with instruction in life planning skills, assemblies and media shows, encourage students to consider a nontraditional occupation. **Then when it comes time to make program choices, students are aware of the full range of options available to them.** They become nontraditional student by personal choice.

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THE RECRUITMENT STRATEGY — WHAT WORKS?

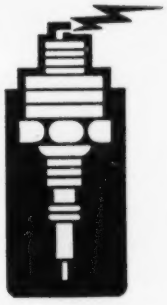
Seek students of all ages for a nontraditional program

High school students are not the only group of potential trainees in a nontraditional field. Women re-entering the work force, dislocated workers, and teen parents are an important source of enrollments. **These adult students will require more detailed information about support services (transportation, child care, financial aid) so that they can realistically consider the program**. But once they become aware of the advantages of choosing a nontraditional occupation, recruitment becomes easier.

What are the advantages?

As students experience less pressure to conform to traditional role expectations, they have the satisfaction of matching their abilities and interests with daily work. They can take pride in being pioneers and role models.

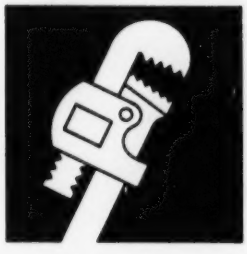
For women, a nontraditional job means greater economic opportunities and a greater chance for promotions, bonuses, and union benefits. For men who choose nontraditional jobs such as secretarial work or nursing, there is the opportunity for steady employment in these and other service occupations. Both men and women in nontraditional fields have increased entrepreneurial opportunities.



Employers can also see the advantages once they realize that they will be getting the best qualified person for a job, regardless of the person's gender. They get highly motivated workers who have specifically selected a profession that correlates with personal skills.

Promote nontraditional careers wherever you go

Since most potential students, especially adults, are not aware of nontraditional careers, it is important to include information about expanded options at every opportunity. Flyers, displays, media, and public service announcements can be presented at civic group meetings, employment agencies, supermarkets, and other community centers. Libraries, veteran and displaced homemaker centers, and social services offices could benefit from promotional materials addressing this issue. Resources designed to meet the needs of the disabled, bilingual student and minorities are especially useful. Provide information at career fairs, counseling centers, and personnel offices of local businesses. **The goal is to educate the public about the value of nontraditional occupations for both workers and employers.**



Whether you are directly involved in nontraditional recruitment, or whether you are simply an educator concerned about choices for students, it is important to promote nontraditional careers wherever you go. Many teachers and guidance counselors do short presentations at PTA meetings, career centers, and school open houses in order to encourage parents and other adults to consider nontraditional careers. When promoting nontraditional work, they relay encouraging information such as personal anecdotes about nontraditional workers who have won awards, been encouraged by their own children, been accepted by co-workers or formed new friendships. They break down potential income into daily expenses to show the economic value of a nontraditional job. The most effective strategy is to invite the workers to speak for themselves!

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HOW DO YOU SUPPORT THE NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT?

Students may not pursue a nontraditional program if their personal lives are not in order. It is difficult enough to be a pioneer and start new training, let alone resolve issues that affect daily living. **Secondary students will need assistance in scheduling, completing pre-occupational skill training, and explaining their career choice to peers and parents. Adults students, particularly re-entry women, will need guidance in arranging for child care, transportation, basic skill review, and other services.** Students who cannot get to the training center, get coverage for their children, or who have to undergo constant resistance from friends and relatives will simply drop out of the program.

Retention of nontraditional students can be accomplished successfully if support services are available. Some students may need **tutoring** (such as math refreshers, familiarity with tools, etc.) to prepare them for class. They may need sessions in preparing for employment, financial planning, or career development. A **mentor**, either from local employers or from the educational institution, can provide business and industry contacts, internship experiences, and guidance during training.

Most important, nontraditional students need to know about each other so that they can lend each other support. Some schools have set up drop-in centers, regular support group meetings, and/or special interest counseling sessions. Involved teachers and guidance counselors provide information about handling problems such as resistance from classmates, sexual harassment, and discrimination. Students not only share information about classroom experiences, but they compare notes and suggestions about how to be a successful pioneer.

From student, to worker, to role model for students

As students begin to complete their training programs, they begin to think about potential employment in their field. Informed educators should be able to direct them to employers who have indicated that they are receptive to nontraditional workers. **By building positive relationships with local business and industry, teachers and guidance counselors can determine what constitutes appropriate training, where the jobs are, and who is looking for the best person for the job.**

Advisors who keep in touch with employers throughout the recruitment and training process can arrange for pre-employment work experiences, traineeships, and apprenticeships. They can invite employers to share information about the type of skills and workers they seek in their companies. Then students can be offered relevant job preparation guidance (resume review, interview techniques, skill demonstration, etc.) that is critical to obtaining a satisfactory position. Once students are on the job, further communication with employers can result in positive work experiences, awards for companies and workers, and public recognition for local employers who support nontraditional employment.

As young students begin to evaluate career opportunities, they should have the chance to meet nontraditional role models. Ideally, a vocational training program sets up a positive cycle — students who have landed nontraditional jobs come back to their training institution, high school, and elementary school and share their experiences with potential trainees. As the cycle consistently repeats itself, hopefully, the term "nontraditional career" will become obsolete.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

- The Nuts and Bolts of NTO: How to Help Women Enter Nontraditional Occupations
  (Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, New Jersey)
- A Helping Hand: A Guide to Customized Services for Special Populations
  (National Center for Research in Vocational Education, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio)
- Facts and Reflections on Careers for Today's Girls
  (Girls Clubs of America, New York, New York)
- Looking for More Than a Few Good Women in Traditionally Male Fields
  (Association of American Colleges, Washington, D.C.
- Handbook of Nontraditional Jobs for Women in New York State Government
  (Center for Women in Government, Albany, New York)

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